



# Managing Historic and Scientific Resources in the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument

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## Introduction

The Marianas Trench Marine National Monument was established by Presidential Proclamation, in 2009, to protect its unique resources of historic and scientific interest.

- The Proclamation only regulates fishing within the Islands Unit, which consists of the waters around Asuncion, Maug and Uracas – the three northernmost islands of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) – from the mean low tide line out to 50 nautical miles.
- The Proclamation bans commercial fishing.
- Monument managers were tasked with defining “traditional indigenous fishing” and “access...for culturally significant subsistence, cultural and religious uses” (Presidential Proclamation 8335).
- This poster summarizes research conducted to document historical and contemporary use and access patterns in the Islands Unit of the Monument, and presents the proposed rules informed by the results of the research.

## CNMI and Islands Unit



Adapted from Barry Smith

## Objectives

- Document past and contemporary trips to the Islands Unit
- Describe the perspectives and experiences of persons participating in these trips
- Explore historical and cultural connections of residents of the CNMI and Guam to the islands and waters of the Islands Unit
- Inform regulations which must protect valuable historic and contemporary resources and protect and manage the area's unique marine ecosystems for contemporary scientific interests.

## Methods

Data were collected from 32 oral histories with 40 persons representing:  
• 27 oral histories collected individually and 5 in groups  
• 35 male and 5 female participants

- 38 residents of Saipan and 2 residents of Guam

Oral history contributors were:

- Residents who traveled to and fished in the Islands Unit of the Monument
- Residents with strong personal/familial connections to the northernmost islands of the Mariana Archipelago
- Government officials and scientists

## Accounts of Trips

Study participants described a minimum estimate of 129 trips to the Islands Unit waters from 1939-2010 and 3.8 trips per year from 1979-2010. Trips were undertaken for fishing, exploring, research, tourism, or transporting goods and supplies.

- On **98%** of trips, fishing took place.
- On **93%** of trips, fish was brought back for sharing.
- On **67%** of trips, fish was brought back and sold.
- On **93%** of trips, fishermen practiced customary exchange  
Customary exchange is the non-market exchange of marine resources between fishermen and community residents for goods and/or services that may include cost recovery for trip expenses.

Primary Purpose	# of Accounts	Years	Fish Brought Back for Sharing/Consumption	Fish Sold to Recover Trip Costs	Fish Sold beyond Trip Costs
Fishing	73	1979-2009	97%	22%	77%
Research	30	1980-2009	77%	20%	0%
Resupply	12	1939-1945	100%	0%	0%
Visit/Explore	6	1989-2009	100%	67%	0%
Charter (tourist)	4	1995-2005	100%	0%	0%
Charter (other)	4	1997-2009	75%	0%	75%
Total	129	1939-2009	93%	20%	46%

*"Here on the island, it's always a tradition that if you come in and you catch a lot, you always give to your neighbor and I can also share with you what kinds of fish I've been catching."*

— Boat Owner

## Cultural Connections

Many participants expressed strong cultural connections to all of the Northern Mariana Islands including, Asuncion, Maug, and Uracas.

- Travelers described a sense of wonder and awe in their accounts of the region.

*"Something really new, it's like you're discovering, exploring something very different from out here. It makes you feel like you are actually an islander."*  
— Boat Owner

- Fish brought back from the Northern Islands has provided a unique food source and continued connection to region.
- Some participants referred to the Northern Islands as an integral part of their home.

## Proposed Rules

- The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council used the findings presented here to inform the proposed regulations for "traditional indigenous fishing" in the Monument.

The regulations are as follows:

- Federal permits and reporting are required and only available to CNMI and Guam residents.
- Customary exchange is permitted when non-commercial fishing in the Islands Unit "to help preserve traditional, indigenous, and cultural fishing practices" (78 FR 12015).

## Conclusions

- The findings from this research were used to design regulations to preserve the historic and cultural importance of fishing in and traveling to the Islands Unit of the Monument.
- This process and outcome illustrates an example of ocean policy that can simultaneously accommodate the interests of remote island residents and scientists interested in researching and protecting these resources.
- This case is presented as an example of policy which can manage resources, both historic and scientific, to meet the needs of both interests.



For more on this poster watch the video

Sincerest thanks to the study participants in CNMI and Guam for sharing their insights. Also thanks to Laurie Richmond and the following entities:

